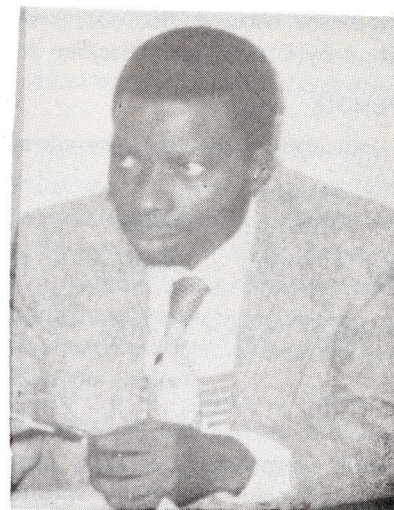


Library Cooperation In Nigeria: The Role of National Library



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Introduction

When Panizzi wrote in his petition to the Trustees of the British Museum that he wanted a poor student to have the same means of indulging his learned curiosity, of following his rational pursuits, consulting the same authorities as the richest man in the Kingdom; it was in pursuit of his desire that the famous library should agree to the lending of its duplicate copies.

Incidentally, library cooperation, has other facets apart from lending. When we speak of library cooperation the following, among others come readily to mind:-

- i) Technical Services sub-divided into
 - a) Acquisition and
 - b) Cataloguing;
- ii) Information and reference services;
- iii) Inter-loans;
- iv) Exchanges and
- v) Co-operative storage.

Library cooperation is imperative as no single library can acquire all its needs. Even, in the technologically developed countries of the world where the population is library conscious and as such, library users abound by the thousands, with relatively generous library funds, it has been established that no single library can satisfy the needs of its own clientele.

Hence, the need for cooperation in whatever facet it is considered most

pressing at a particular point in time. Co-operation may be formal or informal. One can assert, without fear of contradiction that, cooperation is at an informal stage in Nigeria. Nevertheless, it should be noted, that a formalized inter-lending system sponsored by the National Library of Nigeria, with the active cooperation of other libraries and librarians is in the pipeline.

At the informal stage we are operating at present, loans are treated on speculative basis. For example, when a requester wants a book on say "United States Policy on Africa," the reference librarian, on discovering that the title is not available on the shelves of the National Library is likely to direct the requester to the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs Library

There are no tools to resort to in order to locate the materials. The same solution is applied when an enquirer poses a question on "Nigerian Law of Inheritance." He is likely to be directed to the Federal Ministry of Justice Library or to the Library of the Nigerian Law School.

If co-operation has been formalised in the developed countries of the world where they have rich collections, it cannot be gain-said that we in this country need it the more taking cognisance of our meagre resources. Some of the reasons which make library cooperation imperative may be enumerated as follows:-

- i) information explosion - hence no single library can acquire all its needs due to prohibitive costs and storage space;
- ii) the problem of awareness of the existence of all the materials;
- iii) accessibility of the materials;
- iv) increase in the number of people who need information urgently;
- v) prohibitive costs of qualified personnel to handle and process materials etc.

Prominent examples of developed library co-operation systems are SCOLMA, SCANDIA, FARMINGTON PLAN, THE BLLD, the Library of Congress reference and cataloguing operations, British Library MARC Projects and other smaller systems.

Technical Services: Cataloguing, Classification and Acquisitions

The development of the MARC project in both United Kingdom and the U.S.A. is a phenomenal advancement in the field of co-operation in cataloguing. This is a system of cataloguing on tapes, There is no doubt that the MARC is likely to become dominant in the future.

With technological, economic and research advancement generating demand for quick information during Nigeria's industrial take-off via the steel industry, the day may not be far ahead, when the use of the MARC may be introduced into this country.

The international co-operation extended to Nigeria with the introduction of the International Standard Book Numbering (ISBN) and the International Standard Serial Numbering (ISSN) can be said to be experimental or exploratory in our bid to join the mainstream of international co-operation.

- a) **SCOLMA:** The Standing Conference on Library Materials on Africa was established in Britain in the 50s. A number of interested libraries gathered together to collect materials on particular areas/regions of Africa. They agreed among themselves to make available such materials to other libraries that need them.

Of interest to us in this particular project is the fact that Manchester University Library specialises in the collection of materials on Nigeria. This is an attempt at national level, to achieve self sufficiency on library materials on Africa through the joint efforts of participating libraries.

- b) **THE FARMINGTON PLAN:** This is operated in the United States of America. It is similar to SCOLMA. The plan was established in 1948 with about seventy libraries - mainly University libraries - participating. The main objective was to increase the nation's (U.S.) resources of research materials published outside.

The method of division used are (i) subject; (ii) regional. Thus, each of the participating libraries is assigned a subject or a region on/from which it collects comprehensively research materials published. The scheme implies, like the SCOLMA example, making available the materials to other libraries within the system either on inter-library loan or photo-copying services.

- c) **SCANDIA:** Another important phase of library co-operation is the establishment of SCANDIA at the international level in 1956. It embraces the Scandinavian countries - Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Subjects rather than regions are used in co-operative acquisition and dissemination of these materials.

- d) **CALBPC:** Perhaps, the more restricted experiment of the Colorado Academic Libraries Book Processing Centre may be of more immediate

impact on our system, it will therefore be extensively considered.

In the CALBPC scheme, the National Science Foundation of America awarded a grant to the Colorado Council of Librarians "to investigate the feasibility of co-operative centralized processing to serve Colorado academic institutions."

This experiment was designed to monitor operations throughout the acquisition/cataloguing cycle.

- ii) The scheme centred at the Colorado State University Library, with nine academic libraries participating. The first obstacle was on how to convince user librarians to deposit money with the centre.

This was necessary if the user libraries were to submit orders directly to the centre. This hurdle was crossed after necessary consultations with the appropriate authorities. Thereafter user libraries transferred staff members from technical service to other services, and refrained from filling vacancies as they occurred during the experimental period.

In the alternative, some actually transferred staff members to work at the centre. The Technical Services Division of the University of Colorado Centre was used because it had already gained experience in handling and processing for external libraries.

The National Library is at present performing such functions by acquiring and processing materials for its State Branches.

- iii) The members agreed to cataloguing classification and processing specifications before the take-off. The objectives of the experiment were -

1. to calculate processing costs;
2. to measure lag-times from the time an order left a participating library until the book was delivered;
3. to investigate consumer acceptance of products provided in relation to pre-agreed upon processing specifications;
4. to observe the problems of interface between the centre and its users and

5. to determine the congruence of approval plans presently used at two institutions.

For a take-off, a quota was assigned to each of the participating libraries. It needs be noted that since this was an experiment, obstacles were faced and adjustments made to accommodate new problems arising. For example, most libraries could not take full advantage of their quotas for ordering, as such, uncatalogued arrears from stock were taken to the centre instead.

There are many other problems which arose and called for decision before the experiment could continue. However, some of the problems to be anticipated by others contemplating centralized programs of acquisition and cataloguing could be summarized as follow:-

- a) **Finances:** A major capital investment is required to finance staffing and equipment and for acquisition of space. Developmental funds should be made available to prevent stagnation.

A question related to this is whether or not the operation should be located in an existing facility or established as a separate entity, building its resources from scratch. Both alternatives possess merits.

The establishment of the centre within an existing organization permits better utilization and exploitation of existing resources, expertise, bibliographical resources, physical space etc. But there is also the risk of creating a climate of divided loyalties, inter-institutional jealousies, suspicion and favouritism.

In Nigeria, it appears that with our meagre resources, costs will prove prohibitive to start a new centre from the scratch. This is not to dismiss with a wave of the hand, the disadvantages such as divided loyalties, inter-institutional jealousies and even inter-personal jealousies which may be acute at our stage of development.

One fears whether change or co-operation is not resented by many since they believe that there is virtue in inertia. "This is how we have been doing it" or "this is how that is done in my own library, and it is the best method." This type of attitude is likely to ruin the scheme rather than enhance it.